

Greek American Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

With

Bess Anton Feil

April 4, 2006
Sacramento, California

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Greek American Oral History Project

Interview History for Oral History of
Bess Anton Feil

Interviewer's Name: Lisa C. Prince

Interview Date and Location: The interview was conducted on Tuesday, April 4, 2006, at the Downtown Sacramento office of Bess Anton Feil.

Context Notes: Bess Anton Feil is the daughter of Greek immigrant parents. The interview was conducted at Feil's place of business and there are a few interruptions noted in the transcript when the phone or doorbell rang and Feil briefly spoke with clients. At these moments, the tape recorder was stopped and then after the business was attended to, the interview resumed. Efforts were made by transcriber to retain the original syntax and words of the interviewee and interviewer as heard on the tape recording.

Tapes and Interview Records: The original tape recording of the interview and a full transcript are held by the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation in Sacramento. Copies of the recording and transcript are deposited with the Department of Special Collections and University Archives at California State University, Sacramento.

[Session 1, April 4, 2006]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

PRINCE: My name is Lisa Prince, and today is Tuesday, April 4, 2006. I'm here on behalf of California State University, Sacramento, in collaboration with the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation in Sacramento, for the Greek American Oral History Project. This morning I will be talking with Bess Anton Feil about her life history and experiences as a member of the Greek American community in Sacramento. Good morning, Bess.

FEIL: Good morning.

PRINCE: Let's begin by talking a little bit about your background, where and when were you born?

FEIL: I was born at the Sutter Hospital in Sacramento on May 7th, 1926.

PRINCE: Okay, can you tell me a little bit about your mother?

FEIL: My mother was originally from Greece. She came over with my aunt ... as a matter of fact, my aunt ... brought her over. When she came over she brought my mother over also.

PRINCE: And when was that? What year?

FEIL: That was about nineteen twenty-one, twenty-two, right in there somewhere.

PRINCE: Okay, and can you tell me a little bit about your father? Where he was born and ...

FEIL: He was also born in Greece.

PRINCE: Okay, and what part of Greece?

FEIL: I'm terribly sorry but I cannot think of the name of the town ...

PRINCE: That's okay.

FEIL: ... that he was born in.

PRINCE: Was it, do you remember if it was the northern area, or ...

FEIL: No, it wasn't.

PRINCE: Or the south? Or ...

FEIL: It was the western area.

PRINCE: The western.

FEIL: But, I can't ... can't think of the name of it.

PRINCE: That's okay. Did, did he ever talk about ...

FEIL: Oh yes ...

PRINCE: ... what kind of place it was? Was it a small town, or ...

FEIL: It was a small town, a small village type. And, they had a lot of problems because they had a lot of insurgence there, a lot of fighting.

PRINCE: Oh.

FEIL: And that's one of the reasons why he came to this country.

PRINCE: I see, and when did he come to this country?

FEIL: He came over about the same time, although they didn't come together, but he came over about nineteen twenty-two, nineteen twenty-three.

PRINCE: I see. And then they met when they were in the United States?

FEIL: They, well, it was, it was set up.

PRINCE: Oh, I see.

FEIL: In those days, nobody just met. They would set things up for marriage.

PRINCE: I see. And so, their families knew each other in Greece?

FEIL: No. No, no, they didn't know each other at all in Greece.

PRINCE: I see.

FEIL: My mother came over when my aunt was already here.

PRINCE: Okay.

FEIL: And then my father knew my uncle, and that's how they set the thing up

PRINCE: I see.

FEIL: ... for them to meet.

PRINCE: Okay.

FEIL: And then eventually get married, but that's the way things were done then.

PRINCE: Yes. Yes, I, that's what I understand. So did they know anybody, obviously your mother knew your aunt. Did your father know anybody when he came here? Did anybody meet him?

FEIL: ... that I couldn't honestly answer you, I don't know. My sister probably would know more about it she's more a historian than I am.

PRINCE: I see. Did they ever talk about how they felt about leaving Greece?

FEIL: Yes, well, my mother didn't want to leave Greece but 'course the Turks were taking over, where they were living, and so that's why my grandmother, her mother, sent her to America, to get her out of that situation.

PRINCE: I see. And your grandmother stayed behind in Greece?

FEIL: Oh yes, and they were all killed. Her brothers, her mother, her father, everybody.

PRINCE: Oh, so that was a terrible time.

FEIL: Yes it was, very, very bad.

PRINCE: And that was a big reason why ...

FEIL: She got over here.

PRINCE: ... she came, and was it the same reason for your father, do you know?
Did he ever ...

FEIL: I don't think so. I think my father just came to America because America gave all kinds of opportunities, which they didn't have.

PRINCE: Yes. So they definitely had expectations of what America was like and ...

FEIL: Exactly. And what they could expect by moving here.

PRINCE: Do you, did he ever talk about the difference maybe, of the expectations and the reality, were his expectations met, or?

FEIL: Well, they were both, both my mother and father were hard workers. My father went to open up a department store in Lincoln.

PRINCE: Oh.

FEIL: And also went to college in San Francisco once a week. It was called a Chiropody school, which is a foot doctor. They called them Chiropody then, Chiropody.

PRINCE: Okay.

FEIL: And he became a chiropodist, and in his store, where he had in Lincoln, he sold arch supports, and, and shoes that were adjusted to fit the foot.

PRINCE: I see, so he was a foot doctor, basically.

FEIL: Well yes he was, kind of like a podiatrist, in those days.

PRINCE: That's what they call them now, I guess.

FEIL: Yeah.

PRINCE: Oh great, so what was the name of his store in Lincoln?

FEIL: Well, of course it's called Demasis' now. And he's dead too, so ...

PRINCE: The building is still there?

FEIL: Oh yes, yeah, it's still there, and I can't, I can't honestly give you the name of it, I don't remember what they called it ...

PRINCE: That's okay. Do you know how they traveled to the U.S.? Did they take a ship ...

FEIL: By boat.

PRINCE: By boat, and did they ever talk about that journey? What it was like, or how long it took?

- FEIL: It took quite a while, in those days, yeah ... it wasn't like flying over within a few hours. Yeah it took quite a while, and they landed in, at different times, landed in, I think it was New York.
- PRINCE: Oh, okay. So they were in New York first, both of them?
- FEIL: Yes, at different times.
- PRINCE: And did they live in New York for a while?
- FEIL: No, I think they ... probably ... my mother, I think, got on the train right away and then came out here.
- PRINCE: Oh. So she came to Sacramento pretty much right away?
- FEIL: Sacramento, where my aunt was.
- PRINCE: Your aunt was here already.
- FEIL: Right.
- PRINCE: When did your aunt arrive in Sacramento?
- FEIL: She arrived a year or a year and a half before my mother did.
- PRINCE: So that was pretty fortunate for your mother, I bet she was really happy to have somebody that she knew to come and stay with. Yeah, let's see, do you know what your mother's first impressions of the United States was? Did she ever talk about that? Or of California?
- FEIL: Well I think she was somewhat scared. Because she was pretty young, she was like eighteen, I think.
- PRINCE: Oh, I can imagine that would be ...

FEIL: Yeah, you know, and away from her mother and dad and her brothers and all of the things that she was ... that she had grown up with. Of course, even though my aunt was here, her sister, it still was different; she didn't have the language, she didn't have anything.

PRINCE: So she didn't know English when she arrived.

FEIL: No.

PRINCE: And did your father know English when he arrived?

FEIL: No, but he was more aggressive. He went to school.

PRINCE: He went to school to learn the language.

FEIL: That's it. And then beyond that he went on to become a ... a psuedo doctor, you know [laughs].

PRINCE: A foot doctor [laughs].

FEIL: That's it.

PRINCE: Did your mother learn English eventually?

FEIL: Oh yeah, oh sure, yeah.

PRINCE: Did she take classes or did she just ...

FEIL: Well, both of them went to school.

PRINCE: Oh, I see.

FEIL: Oh yeah, at different times.

PRINCE: Okay, did they go to community colleges, or?

FEIL: No, no, in those days we had, I think this country had so many people coming over from other countries. They had schools set up where people could go and learn the language.

PRINCE: Yes. I see, the language schools, and I know a lot of different ethnic communities had their own language schools.

FEIL: Exactly, right.

PRINCE: To help the immigrants, you know, assimilate.

FEIL: Right, right.

PRINCE: Do you know if they had any problems finding work in California? I know you said your father went to school and was more aggressive in that sense ...

FEIL: Yeah, he was more aggressive. That I don't know. Now my mother was never, she never worked outside of the home, she worked in my father's store after they got married, but she's never worked, she ... in those days women didn't really work outside of the home.

PRINCE: But they sure worked.

FEIL: Oh, they worked very hard because we didn't have all the modern conveniences that we have now, you know, now you've got dishwashers, washing machines, vacume cleaners, all kinds of things that make things much easier for you.

PRINCE: Absolutely.

FEIL: And then everything was done by hand.

PRINCE: It took a lot longer.

FEIL: A lot longer, a lot more effort.

PRINCE: Uh huh,

FEIL: Yeah.

PRINCE: Wow. So, let's see, did they pursue American citizenship...

FEIL: Oh yes, Oh yeah.

PRINCE: Right away, or did they take some time?

FEIL: Not right away, my mother did later but my father, immediately. He ...
they were both very, very smart, very bright. And my father, you know,
was very aggressive in learning the language and going to school and
upgrading himself.

PRINCE: And how old was he when he arrived here? You said your mother was
eighteen ...

FEIL: You know, I don't know, to tell you the truth.

PRINCE: But he was a young man though ...

FEIL: Yeah, he was a real young man, I don't think, I think he was just out of his
teens.

PRINCE: I see.

FEIL: Maybe in his twenties.

PRINCE: And did they maintain contact with people in Greece?

FEIL: My father did, until everybody was killed, because all of his family were slaughtered and he just happened to be out of there. But his brothers and mother and dad they were all dead. And kind of the same thing happened to my ... that's one of the reasons why people were moving over here.

PRINCE: Right.

FEIL: The Turks came in to the town that my mother was growing up in and she never heard from her mother or father again.

PRINCE: Oh, that must have been very difficult for her.

FEIL: Yes it was, very difficult. But luckily she was here, the rest of her family were gone.

PRINCE: The rest of them, so how many siblings did she have?

FEIL: She, you know, I can't remember, to be honest with you, I'd have to ask my sister. I'm not sure whether it was three or four sisters and two or three brothers, they had five or six kids.

PRINCE: I see. And your father's family, was it similar?

FEIL: No, I don't think it was as big. I think they had like two or three boys. I don't think he had any sisters.

PRINCE: But he lost all his family?

FEIL: Everybody.

PRINCE: In that conflict with the Turks?

FEIL: Right.

PRINCE: Wow, did they ever go back to Greece, after a few years ... or?

FEIL: No.

PRINCE: Never went back.

FEIL: No, no.

PRINCE: Have you ever been there?

FEIL: No.

PRINCE: And do you have any desire to go?

FEIL: No.

PRINCE: No?

[laughter]

FEIL: No [smiling].

PRINCE: Well, let's talk a little bit about you, if, if that's okay.

FEIL: Okay.

PRINCE: Can you tell me the birth years and the names of your siblings, if you have any? I know you have a sister.

FEIL: I have a sister. I have siblings that are right behind me here [turns to look at photos].

PRINCE: I see...

FEIL: This is my daughter; she's the middle one.

PRINCE: And her name?

FEIL: Kathy.

PRINCE: Kathy, she's very pretty ...

FEIL: And that's Eric, he's the youngest, excuse me [office doorbell].

PRINCE: Okay.

FEIL: This is my oldest son back there with his family. That's Terry.

PRINCE: I see, and he has two children, it looks like ...

FEIL: He has two children that are both grown now, well they were almost grown there, like sixteen and eighteen, now they're – in fact she just celebrated her twenty-eighth birthday, uh, my granddaughter.

PRINCE: Wow ... they're all beautiful.

FEIL: Yeah, they are, they're nice-looking kids. Actually the only one that looks like maybe my family is Kathy, the other two look more like their dad's side.

PRINCE: I see. And when were you married?

FEIL: In 1946.

PRINCE: 1946.

FEIL: December 22, 1946. It was a Christmas wedding.

PRINCE: A Christmas wedding.

FEIL: And we had ... we got married in the St John's Lutheran Church, on nineteenth, I think, Nineteenth or eighteenth and L. And I had to get an okay from the bishop in Greece that I could have the Greek priest perform the wedding also. So we had two, two weddings.

PRINCE: I see.

FEIL: It took two hours and fifteen minutes. We had the Greek wedding first, and then the Lutheran Church afterwards.

PRINCE: I see. Now was your husband Greek also?

FEIL: No.

PRINCE: Oh. He was not ...

FEIL: No, that's why we got married in the ...

PRINCE: That's why you had to have the two weddings

FEIL: The two weddings.

PRINCE: The two weddings, I see.

FEIL: Reverend Romeis [phonetic] did the ... his wedding, and then we had the other one by ... God, I can't think of his name, it's terrible. But they're both dead now, anyway.

PRINCE: Okay.

FEIL: And then we had the reception, we had nine hundred people at the

reception.

PRINCE: My goodness.

FEIL: It was [laughs] It was... well, that was when things were not as costly as they are now. We had two chefs carving, you know, the turkey and the great big ... beef ... at the Senator Hotel. That was when the Senator Hotel was *thee* hotel to be at.

PRINCE: That was *thee* place.

FEIL: *Thee* place, right. And with a band, we had a ten- piece band and the whole thing.

PRINCE: That's amazing.

FEIL: Yes, it was a lovely wedding and if I'd thought of it I could have brought the book down, because I have a great big catalogue of all the wedding and the bridesmaids and the flower girl and everything.

PRINCE: Oh, it sounds wonderful.

FEIL: Yes, it was very nice.

PRINCE: I bet that's a nice memory for you.

FEIL: Yeah, it was. And, uh, then he died. He was ... we were both in our very early twenties. He died when he was forty-eight.

PRINCE: Oh, that's very young.

FEIL: Yeah, he, he had ... he evidently got cancer when he was in the service

overseas and it just manifested as he got a little older ... it finally just went out through his whole body.

PRINCE: Oh, I'm sorry.

FEIL: Yeah, and he was a big man, he was like his oldest son, just a big guy and when he died he weighed a hundred and ten pounds.

PRINCE: My goodness ...

FEIL: He had just deteriorated down to nothing.

PRINCE: Oh, that sounds awful ...

FEIL: Yeah, it was terrible, it was just awful.

PRINCE: So he was in the Army or the ...

FEIL: Navy, the Navy.

PRINCE: In World War Two?

FEIL: Yes. Iwo Jima, or which one? I can't remember where he was. Well, anyway.

PRINCE: Well, tell me a little bit about the houses that you grew up in. You had mentioned Roseville.

FEIL: Well, I was in Lincoln until I was six, and then we moved to Roseville, and I lived in that house until I was about eighteen. And then my father opened up a small restaurant here called Le Marche on Broadway. So we moved down here where Penny is living, in the house they're in.

PRINCE: Oh, okay, and where is that?

FEIL: It's on 41st and M.

PRINCE: 41st and M.

FEIL: And...I stayed there until I got married and then we moved, my husband and I when we married we got the house that he grew up in which was in Florin.

PRINCE: Okay.

FEIL: And then he decided he wanted to become an attorney, so we moved down to Stanford and he went to Stanford for three years, while I worked two jobs to get him through school.

PRINCE: That was very nice of you...

[Laughter]

FEIL: Yeah, well I worked one job which was a secretarial job and then the second job I had, I sang three nights a week with a band.

PRINCE: Oh, so you're a singer.

FEIL: Well, I was, yeah, used to ... and ... so then he graduated and passed the bar, and decided he didn't want to become an attorney.

PRINCE: Oh dear ...

FEIL: After working all those years to put him through law school [laughs] ... he didn't want to do it.

PRINCE: What changed his mind, do you know?

FEIL: He said it's too, too dishonest. He can't, he can't do it.

PRINCE: Oh.

FEIL: He just can't do that to people so he ended up opening up a legal printing shop and he did all kinds of law, law papers that, you know, attorneys would use.

PRINCE: Documents?

FEIL: Documents. And so that's what he did.

PRINCE: Wow, well he used the education.

FEIL: Well he did, yeah he did and then I opened up an employment agency right after we moved back from Stanford, 'cause I was in Personnel when I was working, while he was going to college, and I liked the Personnel, so that's when I opened up an employment agency ... when we got back.

PRINCE: Wow, well you were very resourceful, it seems like.

FEIL: Well, yeah, yeah ... I had to work so I had to think of something.

[Laughter]

PRINCE: And something you enjoyed, I hope.

FEIL: Yeah, well at that point I couldn't do any singing anymore because I had three children I had to raise, so I opened up the employment agency and then I ended up having two other offices besides this, the one that I had,

which was right across the street from Sutter's Fort. There is now a doctor's office there. And then I opened another office over on El Camino.

PRINCE: Oh.

FEIL: So I had the two offices going.

PRINCE: And you were operating both of them?

FEIL: Well I had a manager that was out there.

PRINCE: Oh.

FEIL: Yeah.

PRINCE: Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood? And when you were growing up, do you have any ...

FEIL: I was a brat.

PRINCE: You were a brat?

FEIL: I was, I got into all kinds of trouble ... all kinds of trouble. I was a ... I was a leader in all kinds of trouble.

PRINCE: Really?

FEIL: Yeah, well, I played more with the boys, and because I liked boys' games better than I did girls' games, I didn't like dolls, I didn't like all those things. You know, I loved to climb trees and play baseball and ride my bicycle like mad crazy. My sister couldn't even ride a bicycle, she was

like all thumbs and she just was totally disorganized and disoriented. I rode a bicycle like a maniac.

PRINCE: [Laughs] So you had good balance and ...

FEIL: Yeah, we were completely opposite in that direction.

PRINCE: You sound like ...

FEIL: She was, well she was a real scholar. She had great grades. She was a straight A student in all through school and all through college. I had a terrible time, and I don't think it was because I didn't have the intellect; it was because I didn't care.

PRINCE: Umm, yes.

FEIL: It was not that important to me.

PRINCE: You had other interests, it sounds like.

FEIL: I did. Yeah, I did. Yeah, and so ...

PRINCE: Let's ... go ahead, I'm sorry ...

FEIL: No, I was just going to say that's about ... that's about it, you know ...

PRINCE: Your school, your school days ...

FEIL: Yeah my school days were interesting, I had two years of college, like I said, I went to junior college and then when I met Terry we decided that he was going to go to law school, and then I had to work ... to get him through, because those days, you know, they didn't have all the assistance

that they have now.

PRINCE: Yeah, that's right, so you helped him get through that.

FEIL: Yeah, yeah.

PRINCE: And then did you remain working pretty much? I know you had your children, but you the agencies ...

FEIL: Yeah, I did, I did. I continued working and it was a good thing because then when he passed away I just, but what I did was cut things down. I had to move from where my personal office was on 29th and J - there's a huge doctor's complex there now - So they evicted me from there, along with all the other people that were in a small little area. And so I thought, "jeez, I gotta move someplace," so I started walking down J street one day and this little strip here that I have this building on, was like forty feet wide and sixty feet long, which is hardly anything, really. And I have, I had a real good friend, who's a real estate man. I called him that evening and I said, "I want you to find out- here's the address that's on there". And he said, "Well, is there a for sale sign on there?" And I said, "No, there isn't but that doesn't matter, just find out if they want to sell it."

Well, the people that owned it were elderly so, it was ... the timing was good. And he said, "well they would maybe be open to an offer." So I said, "Offer them twenty thousand dollars." He said, "Twenty thousand

dollars for a corner lot?" I said, "Just offer it to them, all they can do is say no." They took it. [Laughter]

And so, I went and took the money out of savings, gave them the twenty thousand, I bought the property. So then I went to an architect and I said, "This is what I need. I need an office building that will house my employment agency, including something in the back part of it that will give me rent that will pay for the building." So he did that. And this is, it's been here for twenty-two years.

PRINCE: Oh, wow.

FEIL: So I rent the back part, in fact that's where Penny was. The school thing is back there.

PRINCE: Oh, okay.

FEIL: And, of course the building is paid for now. That was when I first started. It was fine, it was paying the rent ... the part that I owed on the building.

PRINCE: Well that was very wise thinking on your part ...

FEIL: Well, it was the only way I could do it.

PRINCE: Good planning.

FEIL: Yeah, so it worked out okay.

PRINCE: Yeah. So can we go back a little way to maybe, high school? Do you have any memories of high school? I know you're not really interested in,

FEIL: Well, I ... no, I was involved in the band. In fact, I was so involved in it, I played all the different instruments. And then the teacher of the department gave me a key to the band room, and so I'd go early in the morning, I'd get there about five-thirty, six o'clock in the morning and practice. I played, like I said, several instruments, but I also played the piano. And so my senior year, I had a concerto that I played. And that was the grade that I got for that class.

I never was much into sports. I really didn't care that much for sports. My whole idea was music and , and ... my sister was more into the literature, I was more into the music, and I ... that's about it. I had some really good friends in high school, and, you know, I had some pretty good years there.

PRINCE: Do you have any contacts with any of those friends?

FEIL: No, no. This was in Roseville and then when I moved down here and went to college I kind of lost track of everybody.

PRINCE: I see.

FEIL: And, you know, everybody went their separate ways.

PRINCE: Yeah, it happens.

FEIL: Well yeah, and it's different ... now with my sister- she went to Sacramento High School and she's still friends with some of the people

that she was involved with at school. She's more of a people oriented- well I am too but not as close as she is- she still has friends that she's had for twenty years. I have maybe two friends from twenty years ... and the rest of them; I don't know what happened to them.

[Laughter]

PRINCE: Do you think maybe that could be because she was here in Sacramento?

FEIL: Yes, and she's more of a, well, she's a little bit ... she's different than I am. She's more of a people oriented, she likes, you know, the camaraderie. I don't need it.

PRINCE: You're just not really interested?

FEIL: Well, I've got enough of it here, you know with all these people I interview all day long -by the end of the day, I'm sick of them!

[Laughter]

PRINCE: Yes, So is that what you do? You interview people for different positions, for jobs?

FEIL: Yes, and I place people on jobs ... so.

PRINCE: Okay. [Interruption] We were talking about school and classmates and that sort of thing ...

[telephone ringing]

PRINCE: I'd like to ask you a few questions about the Greek Community here in

Sacramento. Are you very involved in any of the ...

FEIL: Nope, Penny. Penny and Terry are.

PRINCE: Penny and Terry are.

FEIL: Very, very involved. And Terry is really involved. He's a, just an absolutely beautiful man. She's so lucky to have married him. And I've told her that a thousand times, I've told her, God, you don't know how lucky you are, I say, actually you don't deserve him.

[Laughter] He's too good for you; he's just a lovely person.

PRINCE: Oh, I see.

FEIL: Yeah, I love him like a brother; he's just a wonderful person. All I got to do is call him and say, "Terry, I've a light bulb that's out." -"I'll be right over!" You know like up there? [points up to ceiling light fixture].

PRINCE: That's really nice to have, isn't it? He's like a brother to you.

FEIL: Oh yeah, like I said, he's just an absolutely lovely man.

PRINCE: And this is your younger sister? Penny's your younger sister?

FEIL: Well, there's only two of us.

PRINCE: Oh. Okay.

FEIL: Yeah, oh yeah, she's ten years younger than I am.

PRINCE: I see.

FEIL: I'll be eighty in May and she'll be seventy in Feb ... well she just turned seventy.

PRINCE: Wow. I can't believe you'll be eighty. That's amazing.

[Laughter]

FEIL: Well, nobody would admit to that if they're not eighty. [Laughs]

PRINCE: [Laughs] Right. Okay, I believe you. Do you remember, well, you didn't grow up in Sacramento so you probably don't remember like, a Greek neighborhood, or a Greek community here in Sacramento?

FEIL No.

PRINCE: I know you said your father had a restaurant. What sort of restaurant was it?

FEIL: Over on 19th and Broadway, Le Marche.

PRINCE: And what sort of food was served there? Was it a Greek restaurant?

FEIL: No, no, no ... it was, American food. You know, it was like a hamburger place. It had all kinds of truck drivers and people like that stopping in to get sandwiches and hamburgers and milkshakes and that sort of thing.

PRINCE: I see.

FEIL: And I worked there too. I used to, cause I went to Sacramento City College, which is on twenty-first, down a ways, and he was on nineteenth and Broadway so I'd come there after school and I'd work the rest of the day and then I'd go home with him.

PRINCE: I see, and that was ... what year was that?

FEIL: Oh, my, well, that was about 1944.

PRINCE: Okay. So you were in Sacramento around that ...

FEIL: We were, yeah.

PRINCE: So, are you a member of the Church?

FEIL: Oh yes, oh yeah...uh huh.

PRINCE: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

FEIL: Well, I'm a member, but I'm not ... like Penny and Terry are real members. I'm a member. I pay my dues. I very seldom go because, no, there shouldn't be no because on that. I live in Fair Oaks, I have too many other things to do. My home sits in the middle of three and a half acres, so I have all kinds of stuff that need to be done, and there's nobody else there to do it, except my dog and me. So I find that weekends are very full.

PRINCE: Oh, I see.

FEIL: I'm in the process of doing all kinds of things. I'm fixing up sprinklers, I have rainbirds that sometimes don't work ... I fix them.

PRINCE: Well, good for you. So you have three acres ...

FEIL: Three and a half.

PRINCE: So that keeps you very busy I can imagine.

FEIL: Well, I have a gardener, yeah, I have a gardener.

PRINCE: Okay.

FEIL: But, I have to make sure, 'course now we don't have to worry about watering the lawn [laughter]. But in the summertime, when the sprinklers go on every night, and sometimes they're not working, they just stand still like this [hand gesture] I have to make sure that they're working and oscillating. Turn off that particular line, get down there, pull it out, start cleaning it up, and put it back in again.

PRINCE: I see.

FEIL: And I didn't know a thing about sprinklers before that started, but, you know, you ... you have to do what you have to do.

PRINCE: Exactly.

FEIL: You can't call the gardener every time.

PRINCE: Right.

FEIL: Or my son, "Will you come up here and fix my sprinkler?" That only will last about two times.

PRINCE: Soon he'll be asking you to fix his sprinklers

[Laughter]

FEIL: Yeah.

PRINCE: So, I have a question about the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, or the Greek American Progressive Association, GAPAA, or HEPA, can you tell me a little bit about those?

- FEIL: Well my father used to belong to HEPA. GAPA, I, I don't belong to either one of them.
- PRINCE: Okay. Okay, and HEPA was more, was that the royalists, or the ... or the?
- FEIL: I have no idea. I know it started out – HEPA was first, I think, and then GAPA. But, my father belonged to HEPA.
- PRINCE: But you have no association with that?
- FEIL: Nope, no.
- PRINCE: Okay. So you don't know – like what kind of activities they organized?
- FEIL; Well, I go to them every once in a while when they have activities but I don't belong to it.
- PRINCE: Okay.
- FEIL: I belong to the Church, and I send dues in to the Church, but I don't go that often.
- PRINCE: I see.
- FEIL: I'm not like Penny. Well see, Terry ... if it wasn't for Terry, Penny probably wouldn't go either. But [laughter] Terry's a person that's a church person, he really is ... a beautiful man.
- PRINCE: And they're very involved?
- FEIL: Oh yeah, very.
- PRINCE: So it sounds to me like the church is very involved in the community, the

Greek community in Sacramento.

FEIL: They are. Very much. And 'course they don't live that far from it either.
See, I live in Fair Oaks.

PRINCE: That's right.

FEIL: So it, it really is a pain to have to drive all the way to downtown just ... I
shouldn't say that – just to go to church- that's a terrible thing to say. I
drive downtown *just* to work.

[Laughter]

PRINCE: Yes ... you have to work.

FEIL: Yeah, well, I know, but I should *have* to go to church too.

[Laughter]

PRINCE: So you were telling me about your former husband, or ... your husband,
his name was Terry also?

FEIL: Terry.

PRINCE: Terry. And, now he was born here, he wasn't Greek.

FEIL: No, no he wasn't. He was German.

PRINCE: He was German.

FEIL: But he was born here.

PRINCE: Do you remember any sort of ... of ... maybe problems you thought
might occur because he wasn't Greek, like within your family or the
Greek community, was that ever a problem?

FEIL: No, no. My mother preferred that I would have married a Greek person, but she liked him ... a lot. He was just a really wonderful man, and a, young man at that time, and ... she liked him.

PRINCE: Okay. So it wasn't like it was very important the way it was for your mother, that, you know, things were set up and it was a little different then.

FEIL: No, no it was different, yeah.

PRINCE: I see.

FEIL: And I convinced her.

PRINCE: [Laughs] yes.

FEIL: I was very dogmatic about things anyway.

PRINCE: So, I'm wondering about your own children. Did you ever feel a need to instill a Greek identity in them, or did you ever think about that sort of thing?

FEIL: No I didn't, because as they grew up, we were going to the Lutheran Church in Fair Oaks. So consequently, you know, they were going to the Lutheran Church, which is a German Church. No, we didn't.

PRINCE: So they didn't go to Greek school, or anything like that?

FEIL: No, no, they didn't.

PRINCE: And they were born in Sacramento?

FEIL: In Sacramento. All of them.

PRINCE: And what schools did they go to?

FEIL: Fair Oaks, grammar school, high school. And then college.

PRINCE: I see. Were they ever involved in any kind of Greek folk-dance-type thing?

FEIL: No. Because I wasn't involved. You see, your parents have to be involved for you to be involved, like my sister and brother-in-law are very involved in the Greek community, so their children are involved in that Greek community also. I was not. Primarily because I was not married to a Greek person, and you kind of take your husband's lead.

PRINCE: Umm, yes.

FEIL: Most of the time. Nowadays things have changed considerably. When I got married, actually the husband is the one that kind of set the tone.

PRINCE: For the things that you would be involved with in the community or what have you ...

FEIL: Exactly. Right, right. Yeah, but, you know, things have changed, women now have more equal rights and they're going to do what they want to do.

PRINCE: Right.

FEIL: Now, I don't know whether that's better or not better, but that's the way it is now.

PRINCE: Right. Yeah, well maybe a little of both.

FEIL: It would be nice.

PRINCE: So, I would just like to ask you one more question.

FEIL: Okay.

PRINCE: I don't know if you have an answer for this, but maybe you can offer an opinion. I'm wondering if you think the Greek American Community has changed in Sacramento, through the years, or anything that you might remember about it?

FEIL: Well, the only thing that I have seen that it changed- it became larger. They're more into the Greek Community, where before the Church was not where it is, it was down on, I think, 6th and W. It's a church now, but not a Greek Church. It's, I think the Filipinos, or the ...

PRINCE: The Portuguese?

FEIL: The Portuguese. The Portuguese have it, yeah. And, and, no, I don't think so. Things are better now because we have a lot more going on. Where there, all they had was just church and you know, maybe they'd have some coffee or whatever afterwards. Now, you have all kinds of activities so it pulls everybody into the center of the Greek Community, including the young kids. The children are involved in Greek School. They're involved in kinds of dancing, and all kinds of activities, which is great

because it allows then to learn the ethnic background that I didn't have. Because as I was growing up, being in, living in Roseville, I would go to the Catholic Church with my girlfriend who lived next door, and she was Catholic. So we'd go to the Catholic Church.

PRINCE: I see. So, it sounds to me like, maybe the sense of Greek identity has gotten stronger.

FEIL: It has.

PRINCE: In a lot of ways because of those differences. And I think maybe in the last few decades there's been more of a desire to learn about that heritage.

FEIL: I think so. And I don't think it's only with the Greeks, I think it's with other ethnic groups also.

PRINCE: I agree.

FEIL: And I think it's wonderful that we don't just put it aside and say, oh yeah, well, I'm Greek and it's no big deal. I think it is a big deal to learn all of the background and your history and what it has come to, to this day.

PRINCE: Right.

FEIL: Not only with the Greeks, but the Italians and all of them.

PRINCE: I think that's a wonderful thing too. And just to learn about, oh, the languages, the music, the art ...

FEIL: Oh yeah, the music!

PRINCE: yeah ... and the history ...

FEIL: Yeah, absolutely.

PRINCE: I think maybe, around the middle of the century, the last century, all the conflicts that were happening, and, you know, with the Turks, and the reasons that your mother had to come over, I'm wondering if that maybe, I don't know how it was for your mother, but maybe for you, if that maybe discouraged you from thinking about it too much, or wanting to have that connection?

FEIL: Well, well, she was very heartbroken, because when she left, she left, I think one or two brothers, her father, her mother, and they all were slaughtered. So, you know, it left her with a very bad feeling. She never got to see any of them again. And if it hadn't been for my grandmother pushing that she come over here, she probably would have been slaughtered also. Because the Turks went in there and did a mass slaughtering.

PRINCE: Terrible.

FEIL: You know, in those days, things were not like they are now, you know, they were just ... they had such ... well it's like the war we have going on right now, you know, where the people are just so adamant about getting back at each other.

PRINCE: Yes.

FEIL: God, it's ... that's terrible.

PRINCE: It seems barbaric.

FEIL: It is barbaric! Really.

PRINCE: You would think that we'd have learned something by now.

FEIL: Something, don't you think? Yeah. The animals get along better with each other.

[Laughter]

PRINCE: They know when to part ways, if they have to.

FEIL: Exactly, yeah, right.

PRINCE: Yeah. Well, it's wonderful to talk with you and to hear about your experiences, is there anything else you'd like to share today?

FEIL: No, I can't think of anything that we haven't spoken about. Have you interviewed my sister?

PRINCE: No. I have not.

FEIL: Oh well, that's going to be wonderful. She's got a lot more background to talk about than I have. Because, like I said, I married out of the Greek culture, so I got away from it. Not because I wanted to, but because that's just the way I went, and in those days, when your nineteen years old in 1946, you go the way your husband goes. It's not like it is now- the young girls have their own equal time. And everything is equal.

PRINCE: Uhmm.

FEIL: Now, I don't know whether that's good or not, really, because, nobody seems to want to stay together anymore, and that's kind of sad.

PRINCE: Yeah.

FEIL: They break up for such trivial reasons.

PRINCE: And I would imagine that it wasn't like that before, people worked harder to stay together?

FEIL: Yeah, you worked it out. You stayed together, you had a family, you wanted to raise your family, and, you know what? After you stayed together, after a while, that didn't become such a big deal anyway. You know, once you weather it through, you look back on it, and you think, you know, my husband and I had a lot of times when we were ready to cash it in, but, you know, we'd go on about what we had to do and, my mother, my mother was a good negotiator. She used to talk us out of all kinds of things. But, uh ... [door bell ringing]

PRINCE: Continue this a little bit. You were saying how things have changed so much, and the Greek Community has gotten larger actually, in terms of involvements besides just the Church as it was when you were here.

FEIL: Yes, it has. [door bell ringing]

PRINCE: Okay Bess, well thank you so much again for all your time and for sharing

all your experiences. We really appreciate it. Sounds like you've had quite a life and ...

FEIL: It's been interesting.

PRINCE: Yes, it's interesting. I really appreciate the fact that, you know, it's not typical, you know, you didn't marry a Greek man and that, to me, is just a different kind of experience that I think really adds to this whole project.

FEIL: Well, I didn't do exactly what I was supposed to do, but I've always done it that way.

PRINCE: Yes.

FEIL: I've not done things the way I'm supposed to do them.

PRINCE: And it seems like they've turned out okay.

FEIL: Well, not always, but most of the time it's been pretty good, you know, you keep working at it and working at it and working at it, hoping that it's finally going to go in your direction.

PRINCE: Well, thank you very much.

FEIL: Thank you, for taking the time out to do this. Now have you interviewed my sister yet? No, not yet, you said that.

PRINCE: No. Not yet, yeah, I think somebody else may be interviewing her.

FEIL: Oh, Okay.

PRINCE: Yeah. But I'd like to meet her and her husband at some point.

FEIL: Oh, that would be nice, yes. Well, Terry is a doll, I've told you that. She is too. But she ... was, oh God, she was such a tattler- tale when she was little. Like I said, she was nine and a half years younger than I am – she was always running to my mother to tell her all kinds of things so that she could whip me.

[Laughter]

PRINCE: Ohhh ...

FEIL: But anyway, that's okay, we get along great.

PRINCE: You do.

FEIL: Yeah, now.

PRINCE: She's not a tattler- tale any more?

FEIL: No, no, my mother's gone, so there's no one to tattler to. [Laughs]

PRINCE: No one to tell. [Laughs]

FEIL: Well, it didn't matter then either.

[Laughter]

PRINCE: Well, thank you so much.

FEIL: Well, it's nice to have met you and I hope your project goes well.

PRINCE: Okay, well, we'll let you know all about it.

FEIL: Oh yeah, please do.

PRINCE: Okay.

[End Tape 1 of 1]